

SPRIT OF THE PRESS.

Editorial Opinions of the Leading Journals Upon Current Topics—Compiled Every Day for the Evening Telegraph.

THE DRAWBACK FRAUDS.

From the N. Y. World. It seems to us that the prominence given to such of the developments in what are called the drawback frauds as are really new is quite disproportionate to the intrinsic public importance of such developments. There has been an attempt to throw a sensational flavor over the recent discoveries by elaborate descriptions of the formalities necessary to obtain money from the Government, as allowance or drawback on articles on which an internal tax has been paid, when the articles are subsequently exported to a foreign country, and not consumed within the limits of the United States.

"And he further enacted, That from and after the date on which this act takes effect, there shall be an allowance or drawback on all articles on which an internal duty or tax shall have been paid, equal in amount to the duty or tax paid thereon, and no more, when exported; the evidence that any such duty or tax has been paid, and that the satisfaction of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue by such person or persons shall claim the allowance or drawback, and the amount to be ascertained under such regulations as shall from time to time be prescribed by the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, under the direction of the Secretary of the Treasury, and the same shall be paid, by the warrant of the Secretary of the Treasury on the Treasurer of the United States, out of any money arising from internal duties not otherwise appropriated."

It will be seen that the Commissioner of Internal Revenue is made by the law the responsible officer in the execution of this section. On his decision the Secretary of the Treasury is required to draw the warrant. When, many months ago, the character of the frauds was discovered by information given, as was said, to the District Attorney of the United States in Brooklyn, and prosecutions against the parties implicated were thereupon commenced, the public was fully informed as to the regulations prescribed by Commissioner Rollins, under the direction of the Secretary of the Treasury, and also the machinery by which money was illegally obtained. It was thoroughly understood then that, in order to obtain money as and for drawbacks, the Government must be satisfied first, that on specific merchandise a certain amount of money had been paid to the Internal Revenue official as a tax; secondly, that the identical merchandise, in the condition in which it was when the tax was paid, had been exported to a foreign country and actually landed therein.

Non proof on these two points, Congress had authorized the Executive to return the money to the person paying the tax. It was then understood by the public, and we assume by Government officials also, that inasmuch as the merchandise, if regularly exported, must have gone through a custom-house of the United States and been made to appear in the manifest of the ship or vessel transporting the same, the collector of the port of exportation would be the proper person to prove the fact of exportation, as the Treasury regulation said he should be. When, therefore, many months ago, District Attorney Tracy examined into these frauds, he must have come to a perception of the fact that, if a custom-house officer had certified to the Commissioner of Internal Revenue that on the proper manifests it appeared that certain merchandise had been exported on a certain date and by a certain vessel, and the truth was that the manifest of the vessel referred to contained no such record, or that there was no manifest on file of any such vessel, then there must be something wrong about the Custom House official who had made such certificate. It appears now, by the evidence before Commissioner Osborn, that the initials of Chief Clerk Blatchford, then a chief clerk in the Custom House and promoted by Collector Grinnell to be a deputy collector, were on all or a great part of the fraudulent certificates; that the deputy collector gave his signature to the certificate as a matter of course, relying upon the fidelity of his chief clerk, who represented that he had made the needed examination and found the facts as he stated them to be. Now, if this be so, did the officers of the Government, including Mr. Tracy, stop at this point which implicated Mr. Blatchford? Did they make inquiry as to whether his initials were forged? Did any person at that time require him to report how it happened that he had given his initials to statements in regard to the contents of manifests which he said were on the file of the Custom House, which, upon examination, turned out to be utterly false? If this was not done while the matters were under examination by Government officials, many months ago, it is important for the public to be informed of the reason. We do not fail to remember that District Attorney Pierpont, who, so far as it appears, up to that time had no personal or official knowledge of these drawback transactions, was told by one Korn, a person already implicated, of the alleged complexity of Mr. Blatchford. That is all well enough, so far as concerns District Attorney Pierpont, and the public have reason to commend that officer for the fidelity with which he seems to have followed up the matter after it came to his attention, although we do not quite understand why it took the Treasury Department six weeks after Korn gave the information to satisfy itself whether Deputy Collector Blatchford was or was not a conspirator with the parties already implicated by District Attorney Tracy.

In a word, the only new development in these drawback frauds, beyond what was disclosed many months ago to the public by the District Court in Brooklyn, seems to be the imputed guilt of Mr. Blatchford. Here again there is something quite inexplicable in the conduct of Secretary Boutwell, who permits Mr. Blatchford, so far as the public is aware, to still retain the commission of deputy collector of the customs revenue. It is useless for the Treasury Department to pretend that there can be any such mystery as requires so long time to ascertain whether or not Mr. Blatchford is guilty. Six weeks have elapsed since their attention was brought to that officer by Korn. If Blatchford is not guilty, then some of the action of District Attorney Pierpont in the pending trial is very strange towards him. If, on the contrary, Mr. Blatchford be guilty, it is very unjust to the public that the former be permitted to retain so responsible an office. An example should at once be made of him by conspicuous expulsion.

THE REIGN OF THE TITE-BARNACLES.

From the N. Y. Times. It is hard work to break down any system which politicians have found handy for purposes of corruption. We have not only to fight against the corrupters, but the corrupted, and the still more numerous class which is quite willing to be corrupted if any

one will make it worth their while. But if the public can once be brought to a proper appreciation of the evils produced by a vicious institution, they may be relied upon to sweep it out of the way. We have long endeavored to secure a reform of the Judiciary in this State; and to superficial observers it might have seemed that our labor was lost. But the very heavy vote—it may turn out to be a majority—for the Judiciary article recently submitted to the people, shows that the public mind is always open to the reception of truth. For this reason we gladly welcome any new effort to arouse the whole country to the importance of remedying the civil service. We may have to toil on for some time yet, but "constant dropping wears away a stone," and we shall certainly win in the end. It is impossible that people can go on reading Mr. Jencks' statements and arguments, or articles like those of Mr. Adams in the North American Review, and of Mr. Parton in the new number of the Atlantic Monthly, or the essay of Mr. G. W. Curtis at the Social Science Congress, without being stirred to rid the country of one of the greatest scandals associated with it, at home or abroad.

The civil service is a dishonest blunder from beginning to end. When we have a good man in any post we rarely allow him to remain there long. We either transfer him to some appointment for which he is not fitted, and in which his special abilities are utterly thrown away, or we get rid of him altogether, and put a worthless, incompetent, unprincipled office-seeker in his place. People go to members of Congress and demand appointments as a matter of right. The same plan is sometimes tried in England. A voter goes to a member of Parliament and says:—"I was on your committee at the last election, and, as you know, I had a good deal to do with your success. Now I want to get my son into a Government office. But the member cannot help such a man if he would. The Prime Minister himself could not put any one into a public office, although he might give him an appointment outside of it. All he can say to the applicant is:—"If your son possesses the qualifications exacted by the particular office you wish him to enter, he will be able to pass the competitive examination, and that is the only door open to you, me, or anybody else." The son of a lord must pass just the same examination as the son of a shoemaker. People who wish their children to enter the civil service have them trained at school, especially for it, and if they fail to pass the examination, they know that it is necessary to find some other occupation for them. Back-stairs influence will do no good whatever. But in this country the member of Congress badgers the head of a department until he gets places for as many of his friends as he is anxious to oblige.

Of course we lose all the good men and get all the bad by this process. You cannot induce first-class men to go begging round among members of Congress for an appointment. The persons who are ready for that kind of work are the very ones whom the Government ought not to employ at any price. The Government, to begin with, does not pay enough to compensate able men who have no private means for devoting the whole of their time to the service of the country. The late Chief Justice of the Supreme Court gave up a lucrative practice at the Maryland Bar in order to accept the post offered him by the Government. His habits were moderate, but he died in a destitute condition. "When I was in Washington last winter," says Mr. Parton, "the daughters of the late Chief Justice were earning a scanty pittance as school-keepers by copying documents in one of the public offices at eight cents per hundred words." Another member of the Supreme Court was last winter paying the whole of his salary for the board of himself and his wife. It took all the ex-Attorney-General's salary to pay his rent. We all know what happens when men of an inferior type are placed in this predicament. They eke out their salaries by taking bribes, by plundering the public, by defrauding the Government—and they persuade themselves that they are justified in so doing because the Government is trying to cheat them by taking the time to appoint them for it.

The perpetual scramble for place is demoralizing to the public mind, and impeding the business of Government in every direction. It is all very well to recommend people to go out to the wilderness and work. Why should they toil for bread when by scheming and intriguing they may obtain an "office"? Of course a large proportion must fail. But they never give up hope. They would rather dog the heels of a member of Congress, or haunt the precincts of the White House, for a year together, than do a day's hard labor. Once let it be understood that a proof of competency will be required from every man before he can obtain office, and at least so far as the civil service is concerned. For this reason we recommend, as we have done before, the institution of a system of competitive examinations. What can be fairer? The best man will win in the larger number of cases. A higher standard of honor would prevail in the new service, and that alone would go far towards extinguishing corruption. In England the plan has answered to perfection, and it has been extended to India with the very best results. Once, valuable appointments in the Indian civil service were in the gift of a few families. Now the poorest boy in Great Britain is eligible to compete for them—and what is more, the poorest boys often get them. It is not an untried experiment which we urge upon the public attention. It has produced an efficient civil service in every country where it has been adopted. Why should we hesitate to ascertain the qualifications of our public servants before engaging them, and afterwards to remunerate them at a fair rate? It is the only way of getting the work of the nation well and honestly done.

INTERNATIONAL RACES—MORE CHALLENGES FROM MR. ASHBURY.

From the N. Y. Herald. A letter has been written by Mr. Ashbury, the owner of the English yacht Canby, challenging Mr. James Gordon Bennett, Jr., to a series of yacht races. The challenges are as follows:—"Race No. 1.—A race in the first week of March, 1870, from Hyde round the Isle of Wight, Royal Thames Yacht Club measurement and time allowed; no restriction as to number of hands, canvas, or friends; to start from our anchors all canvas down." "Race No. 2.—A race from Hyde round Cherbourg Breakwater and back, Royal Thames Yacht Club measurement and time allowed; no restriction as to number of hands, canvas, or friends; to start from our anchors with foresail and mainmast set." "Race No. 3.—About the 15th of the month of March, a race from Cowes to New York; a flying start, and no allowance as to tonnage, time allowances, or restrictions of any description." "Race No. 4 and 5.—Two races in New York waters, over the usual course of the New York Yacht Club, and in accordance with their mode of measurement, time allowances, or other usual conditions."

Mr. Ashbury's challenges promise to become famous in the annals of aquatic sport. Hitherto, so far as they are known on this side the Atlantic, they have been conspi-

ous by their barrenness in results. Whether this has been due to the apathy or timidity of yachtsmen generally or to some unfortunate peculiarity in the challenges themselves, the persons most interested are best fitted to decide; but when a man issues a regular gamut of aquatic defiance and never finally comes to the trying of even a single point among all those he proposes to settle, it must seem to the general public either that his points are trivial or that the universal voice of fairness of his terms. In the former challenge from this gentleman, of which our readers have heard a great deal, he proposed to contest the possession of the cup won by the America, and also in an ocean race the relative merits of the English and American models for yachts. Neither point is trivial. But the cup is held on certain conditions, and when these are complied with its holders have no option—they must make a race. The failure to race, therefore, could not be their fault. No race was made for the cup simply because Mr. Ashbury did not see fit to comply with the plain necessary conditions. In the proposed ocean trial, Mr. Ashbury coupled his challenge with conditions that made a race impossible, and insisted on those conditions, so that he resolutely prevented the race he seemed to desire.

His present challenges have the same impractical character. He knows by positive declarations frequently printed that the owner of the Dauntless will not make any but an ocean race in any case where the build and model of the vessels are such as to give the contest an international character; that he will not expose such a contest to the accidents of eddies, currents, and pilotage, but will only wage it on a sea where the chances are far more likely to be even and where it is possible to get a fair result of sailing power, endurance, and of seaworthiness in every aspect. Although this has been distinctly stated to him, Mr. Ashbury still issues his cartel with a proposal for a race sandwiched between two or three little impossibilities. Why? Is it because he knows that it will not be accepted?

Mr. Ashbury may not be quite satisfied with the position he was left in by his failure to make any race with all his former challenges, and he may desire now to improve that position. He at first issued several challenges, so separate in their character that intention that different parties were at liberty to take him up on different points. The owner of the Dauntless accepted one of these, and Mr. Ashbury avoided this acceptance on the point of relative size, though he now says:—"I am willing to set aside all technical questions of mode of measurement as regards the principal race, and accept as the American champion your vessel the Dauntless in lieu of one of the Cambria's size, as required by me in my formal challenge to all America in 1868." 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